Dr. Van Dyke and the Open Life

A Review by MAXWELL STRUTHERS BURT.

THIS is a good book and has a good form, even down to the grass green of its cover, for it was evidently intended by the publishers to be slipped into a man's pocket during the summer months and be carried about on fishing trips or in camp or on July or August walks. Here has been collected all of Dr. Van Dyke's poetry dealing directly with the out of doors, from "The After-Echo" and "Dulciora" of his earliest writing days — 1871, when he was still an undergraduate at Princeton—to his "Salute to the Trees," written in 1920. A long span of work and a long span of love and observation—fifty years.

The little book—for wisely enough, as has been indicated, it is a little book, as all books of poetry should be; although it is a compact little book and solid—is divided into four sections. The first, entitled "Of Birds and Flowers," contains Dr. Van Dyke's famous bird songs, such as "The Veery," "The Maryland Yellow-throat," "The Angler's Reveille," and so on. The second section—"Of Skies and Seasons"—"When Tulips Bloom," "Salute to the Trees," "How Spring Comes to Shasta Jim," "Spring in the South," "Spring in the North" and numerous others. The third section—"Of the Unfailing Light"—The Grand Canyon" and perhaps Dr. Van Dyke's best beloved poem, "The God of the Open Air." And the fourth and final section—"Wayfaring Psalms in Palestine"—the by no means so well known unrhymed hymns such as "The Pathway of Rivers" and "The Distant Road."

The book has a wide appeal outside of its appeal to the lovers of poetry. It has a historical value as showing the development of a man's powers; a technical value, since many important metrical forms have been used, and a very practical value; the last concerning any one of thousands of nature lovers and bird lovers and sportsmen. Dr. Van Dyke has put into words, in a way much more easily to be remembered than if the same information were contained in a text book, the salient characteristics of songsters, of skies, of trees and of countrysides; and this is infused with such a definite passion for the things described that a direct contact is made. It is refresning in a period in which American verse and American prose—not English verse or prose—are distinguished by either an odd disregard of nature or else a strange Aramaic perverted sense that it is merely the reflection of a man's moods or passions, to come across anything that has the translucent separate quality of sunshine or spring or call notes.

Dr. Van Dyke has wisely included, and with a fine disregard of contemporary criticism, all his poems having to do with the subject in question. The gesture is a satisfactory one; simple, self-contained, and that of an experienced and learned man. To many some of the earlier poems may seem old fashioned and ingenuous. Of course. And why not? Dr. Van Dyke has been writing for five decades, and it is only the very young and ignorant reader or critic who imagines that the value of a piece of literary work can be measured by immediate fashions. Also it is only the very young and ignorant critic who fails to understand that in order to judge a man reasonably it is necessary to take not the sum total of his output, not his average, but the highest point reached; the times he has struck a dominant note. Otherwise, all poets are condemned—Blake, Wordsworth, Shelley, Milton, Tennyson, Browning. And since there is nothing that changes quite so fast as the mode in literature, and since no poet can tell, nor any one of his readers, nor any one of his critics, while he is still alive, the exact value of a separate example of his writing, nor for many years after his death, the wise poet puts his wares on the table and lets the world make choice. After all, the intelligent man can do for himself, without the aid of critics, in respect to a living man what time invariably does for a dead man. The process of winnowing is not a new one. Yet even here dogmatism pauses. What pleases one intelligent man frequently fails to please another.

Recently in reviewing the collected work of any man over 30 one has found oneself sooner or later, and much to one's irritation, adopting a slightly defensive attitude. The defensive attitude in reality is not necessary; is becoming increasingly less so. Even the "'Junior Intelligentsia" is beginning to settle down and have babies and perceive the startling truth that history did not begin on Armistice Day nor was any especially new revelation given. Heyward Broun has said recently that a man's value as a novelist is measured by the number of individuals he has given to the family of fiction. It is necessary to go even further back than that and recall an ancient critical assertion much overlooked. A man's value and interest as a novelist or a poet or anything else is measured by the definiteness of the shadow he casts upon the screen of life; by his ability to project his personality and by the worth of that personality. "Songs Out of Doors" is one reflection of a many sided and uniquely valuable personality; one of the half dozen or so really great personalities—already accredited; that is—at present left in the country.

After a photo © by Pirie MacDonald

Henry Van Dyke.

SONGS OUT OF DOORS. By Henry Van Dyke. Charles Scribner's Sons.

For Brothers of the Compleat Angler

THE FLY FISHER'S ENTOMOLOGY. With colored representations of the natural and artificial insect, and a few observations and instructions on trout and grayling fishing. By Alfred Ronalds. A new edition with colored plates, edited by H. T. Sheringham, fishing editor of the *Field*. Cincinnati: Stewart, Kidd Company.

DAYS AND NIGHTS OF SALMON FISHING IN THE TWEED. With a short account of the natural history and habits of the salmon. By William Scrope. Edited with introduction notes and appendix by H. T. Sheringham. Cincinnati: Stewart Kidd Company.

THE fishing editor of the London *Field* has done a good turn to the great family of game fishermen throughout the country by editing new editions of these two famous old books, one of which, Ronalds's, was first published in 1836, and the other, Scrope's standard treatise on salmon fishing, first saw the light in 1843. The two handsome volumes now find an American publisher, and are hence more readily accessible to a greater number of American fishermen than heretofore.

Mr. Sheringham declares that Scrope's book is "a great classic," and one which is now very hard to come by. The first edition is held at a very high price, the edition of 1354 almost as rare, and the only modern edition twenty years old and out of print. Besides the literary quality of its author, the technical interest of the book is very great. Says Mr. Sheringham: "We murmur, *Tempora mutantur* and *nos mutamur in illis* when we read the chapter on salmon spearing or the injunction that salmon to be taken *recte si possis . . . si non quocunque modo*? But in other respects the interest is fresh and topical. The way of a salmon with a fly in 1921 is just what it was in 1842, and if Scrope were to revisit the Tweed to-day he would surely find himself just as successful an angler, perhaps more successful, thanks to the later improvements in equipment. For the salmon is the same fish all the time. *Plus ca change, plus c'est la meme chose.*

And as to the relative catches, now and then, Mr. Sheringham says: "As regards the catch of fish by the rod it is probable that the angling has not greatly deteriorated since Scrope's day. In 1920 the river had what was considered to be the best spring season in its annals, though the autumn fishing was not at all good. But the total catch of fish is very much less than it was early in the last century. . . . Pollution, the increased land drainage and the operation of the nets all, no doubt, had played a part in the decline."

Knowledge of the salmon has much increased in recent times, and among the means to this end one of the most important is the science of scale reading, a modern development "which," says Mr. Sheringham, "has enabled us to pronounce with a good deal of certainty as to the age of the fish and the main outlines of their life history. . . . The study of fish scales was first undertaken by a Dutch naturalist, Leeuwenhoeck, in the seventeenth century. . . . The pioneer of salmon scale reading was Mr. H. W. Johnston, who published the first statement on the subject in the *Field* newspaper in 1904." The reproductions, in line engraving, of fish scales are among the most interesting details in this book of fascination for the angler. There is no space for more than the most desultory reference to the great mass of modern statistics of fishing, besides all the detail of Scrope's personal experiences, which fill these pages. The illustrations, printed in many colors, are of the greatest delicacy, and a large number of old drawings and prints, several by the hands of distinguished Academicians, add to the beauty and interest of the treatise.

In his introduction to Alfred Ronalds's book Mr. Sheringham remarks that "the literature of fly fishing is now perhaps richer than that of any other individual section of sport. . . . It seems to appeal to men of every type of mind. There are many distinguished names in the history of angling. . . . This explains the size of the fisherman's library; there are plenty of readers. The late Mr. Daniel B. Fearing of New York was said to have accumulated something like 10,000 volumes on the sport, and I do not suppose he regarded his collector's business as concluded. And every year adds new books to the total." So far as known this literature begins in a book written about the third century B. C. Then there is a great gap till about the middle of the fifteenth century, when "The Treatyse on Fysshynge" was presumably composed. This book got into print in 1496.

Mr. Sheringham tells us that Ronalds's "Fly Fisher's Entomology" is the first really standard authority on the subject, and it is still the standard eighty-four years after it first appeared. He instigated a fresh interest in fly fishing as an art, which led to the dry fly entomology of Halford. Mr. Sheringham declares that he has always wondered that we do not owe the first definite impulse to dry fly fishing from Ronalds himself. "He observed so closely and knew the ways of flies and trout so thoroughly that he must even have been on the verge of enlightenment." The editor goes into an elaborate geological theory bearing on the dry fly matter. He also has much information as to tackle and gives expert advice to his readers. He praises American rods, but finally refuses to believe that the English rods cannot be made equally well. The colored plates scattered through the book give exact color details of the myriad flies, and the process of "tying a fly" is explained pictorially. Two plates of modern flies are added in this volume to the series in Ronalds's book. The volume has long been reckoned a necessary possession of the fly fisherman as well as of the collector. The present issue is likely to be fully and widely appreciated.

The Open Shore—
The Open Sea

THE HAUNTS OF LIFE. By J. Arthur Thomson. Harcourt, Brace & Co.

WHATEVER Prof. Thomson has to say carries the weight of authority, as he is universally recognized as one of the leading biologists of the day. In addition to scientific precision he also has the none too common faculty of simple, direct narrative, a rare ability to make things clear and understandible. If he has not quite the magic touch of Hudson or the charm of our own Beebe he is, none the less the poet and seer as well as the scientist—a combination that is not common but involves no contradiction. His greatest value lies precisely in the breadth and comprehensiveness of his view, his vision of life as a whole, and his exposition of the progressive fitness and adaptability of all the various parts that work together to make up our universe. His minute examination of some of these parts does not blind him to the whole, and he makes the reader see how each atom is striving to fit itself into the immense composite fabric of life.

These six lectures aim to give "vivid pictures of the great haunts of animal life, and to get glimpses of the subtle ways in which living creatures solve the problems of particular places." It is of course, a selection, a very well made choice of examples, drawn from many fields, to illustrate various methods of adaptation and growth. For example, in the chapter on "The Conquest of the Dry Land," we get a glimpse of certain betwixt and between animals that are at present making the transition between water and dry land. He tells us that:

"On many tropical shores there is a quaint fish called Periopthalmos, with protruding, very mobile eyes. At low tide it skips about among the rocks, hunting small animals, even catching insects. As it clambers on to the exposed, bent knee-like roots of the mangrove trees, it may be spoken of as a fish that climbs trees."

The various chapters deal with "The School of the Shore," "The Open Sea," with its whales, sea serpents, barnacles, swimmers and drifters, "The Great Deeps," with their uncanny creatures, "The Fresh Waters," and finally with "The Mastery of the Air." It is a fascination narrative, full of entertainment as well as information. But more important is the general conclusion, which is suggested in his discussion of the little known great deeps of the oceans, when he remarks:

"Not the least of our gains is this, the demonstration that there are no slums in nature. In these inaccessible haunts, in this world of darkness, there is the same order, the same fitness, the same finished perfection, the same beauty that we find elsewhere."

The book is very well made, and elaborately illustrated with many striking and unusual photographs, such as that of the huddled group of strange birds on a broad pillar of rock in the Farne Islands, and also with numerous well made drawings. It is popular science at its best—strictly scientific, and nevertheless wholly popular in its intelligibility and in its wide interest.

Harry A. Franck, according to a note issued by his publishers, has been talking to capacity houses out on the Pacific coast. The folks out there seem fairly avid for stories of his travel experiences. In Seattle money had to be returned on 200 tickets of people who had not been prompt to arrive, for there was no way to accommodate them, though Sir Auckland Geddes and Marshal Joffre were both holding receptions in the city the same evening.